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**Hip Hop and Diaspora: The Significance of Afro-American Music in  
the Creation of Identity**

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## **Abstract**

This essay aims to provide a look on the appropriateness to classify hip-hop as a product of Afrodiasporic oral and musical traditions. Music is a conduit which provides resistant identities to the dominant cultures. So, this essay is going to expose how reggae and blues music have been key in the development of Hip Hop and will take examples from these genres to illustrate how African Americans created identities within adverse environments through music. Finally, this paper will explore how hip-hop is a product of its context and how music reflects the difficult realities most African Americans face.

Key Words: Hip Hop, slavery, diaspora, reggae, blues, identity

## **Resumen**

Este ensayo tiene como objetivo proporcionar la idoneidad de clasificar el hip-hop como un producto de las tradiciones orales y musicales africanas. Este observará cómo la música sirve para crear identidades resistentes a las culturas dominantes. El reggae y el blues han sido clave en el desarrollo de este género y este ensayo tomará ejemplos de estos para ilustrar como los afroamericanos crearon identidades en entornos adversos. Finalmente, este artículo explorará cómo el hip-hop es un producto de su entorno y cómo la música refleja las difíciles realidades en las que se enfrentan la mayoría de los afroamericanos.

Palabras clave: Hip Hop, esclavitud, diáspora, reggae, blues, identidad

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The cultural and musical movement of Hip Hop was born in the heart of the inner-city of New York, more specifically the Bronx borough. What is important to note is the cultural diversity of this densely populated area, being composed of African Americans, Latino Americans and Caribbean immigrants among others. Hip-hop meant a cultural exchange between the multiple ethnicities in the form of block parties, where DJs played popular songs using turntables and encouraged dancing and participation. However, the importance of this genre does not rely solely on its popularity, but also in the manner it is used as an artistic expression. Music works as a conduit to preserve and create identity and culture, thus, going back to the ethnicities that founded hip-hop, we find a shared past of immigration, racism, and even slavery that made music an essential part of their identity. For all these reasons, hip-hop is a key element through which we can analyze the history and culture of the African American community. Thus, this essay will demonstrate how hip-hop, via different sources, has contributed to shaping Afro-American identity.

This essay does not try to tell the whole story of Hip Hop, as it is a daunting prospect to take on, however, it is going to explore the roots of African American music, from colonial times to the contemporary African American experience through the stories and lyrics of hip-hop. As Dick Hebdige states, “the journey from African drums to the Roland TR 808 drum machine” is not a straightforward process as it “circles back upon itself at every opportunity” (2000, p. 11). The birth and evolution of Hip Hop, like any cultural movement, is not the result of hierarchical evolution. Instead, Hip Hop is the outcome of the social and cultural exchange of many ethnicities, cultures, societies, and experiences that have, in some sort of way, passed on the legacy of the African oral and musical tradition.

To begin with, this essay is going to explore the roots of the African oral and musical tradition to understand the fundamentals of music during the African Diaspora. By focusing on the appropriateness to classify Hip Hop as a cultural movement, this essay will spotlight the injustices Afro Americans have undergone and how music has been a conduit in which black people have been able to express and create identities in adverse environments. At its inception, like most black musical genres, hip-hop challenged the ruling elites that oppressed socioeconomically impoverished minorities. Powerful messages such as Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power” or N.W.A.’s “Fuck tha Police” still resonate the angry voices of black people: an echo of a certain musical and oral tradition.

Some important considerations are certain principles in African music that differ from the Western classical tradition. We must consider these to analyze the intricacies of Africa-born music. For instance, collective voice is given more emphasis over the individual one, rhythm plays a much more important role, and drumming is the main link with public life, speech and human voice (Hebdige, 2000, p. 12). Rhythm in hip-hop is the result of the interconnection between cultures, histories and identities that give form to this everchanging cultural and musical movement.

## **2. HIP HOP AND DIASPORA**

### *2.1. Resistance based music*

Music is an art form capable of promoting unity between people who identify with the same culture, creating and preserving history. Therefore, the bonding created through music can work as an act of cultural resistance against ruling elites and certain socio-cultural norms. The African diaspora is key to understand the creation of resistance-based music as it is marked within a context of poverty and suffering. The common background of distress among the African-American community goes back to colonial times, when the British Empire took over the isle of Jamaica in order to initiate the transatlantic triangular trade, in which millions of Africans were caught and shipped to the New World to work the plantations.

Slaves' lives were restricted in innumerable ways, but one of the few aspects they could preserve was their musical tradition. One early example of resistance against the ruling elite dates back to 18<sup>th</sup> century Trinidad, when slaves in the area developed an instrument in order to preserve their musical tradition as a response to French carnival. This was seen as a menace and despite prohibition and prosecution from authorities, their "drum music" evolved into the steel pan instrument: the island's de facto instrument (Hebdige, 2000, p. 19).

### *2.2. The African oral tradition and the griot*

The African oral tradition is of utmost importance to analyze how hip-hop music contributes in the creation of African American identities. Due to lack of written records, African history and culture were only passed down to other generations by orature or *griotism* – storytelling in a musical style. Orature, thus, was a way to preserve history and culture between individuals, but not any less legitimate than written texts. In orature, improvisation and memory are key for the act of performance: "the performer's body is one with the body of her culture and, in this way, connects to the bodies of her audiences" (Banks, 2010, p. 240). Therefore, we can observe these aspects in hip-hop performative

elements such as free-styling, breakdancing, and DJing – to name a few. The African oral tradition is channeled in rap music as it is filled with vivid stories that reflect the past of the African oral tradition.

Having observed the importance of orature, we must now analyze the figure of the *djeli* or *griot*. Griots are the most prominent figure in performance and storytelling in the African tradition, a “living archive of his people's traditions” (Bebey, 1975, p. 24). But he “is above all a musician” (Bebey, 1975, p. 24) as he typically accompanied stories with music during a social event to enhance them. This explains the strong musical tradition that Africa has exported around the world. In fact, griots are a fundamental pillar in African societies as they empowered African communities through the African Diaspora and are source of an alternative education, away from Western thinking.

Unfortunately, their female counterparts have gone unnoticed by scholars. *Griottes* have been overlooked as the cultures they come from are male dominant and research on African studies continues to be profoundly marked by the male point of view. As Thomas A. Hale claims “griottes are both more numerous and in many cases more famous than their male counterparts” (1994, p. 75). In the griot tradition, the man’s job is to play musical instruments whereas women sing, making their presence essential (Hale, 1994, p. 75). So, griottes have always been important to the preservation of the African cultures but their study and acknowledgement have gone unnoticed due to male centered society and study.

All in all, griots are particularly interesting to analyze in hip-hop as some influential figures credit them as the roots of rap. In fact, Afrika Bambaataa, one of the most prominent figures in Hip Hop, calls the contemporary rapper a ‘postmodern *griot*’ as they function much as the same way (Elese, 2018). These oral artists “tell about the community’s issues, values, ancestors, heroes and heroines, triumphs, and struggles” (Banks, 2010, p. 240). For the African community, the arts are born in the social and cultural flow of the population’s lives. Thus, from the very start, we can observe a connection with contemporary politically aware hip-hop and its African origins. Hip-hop takes the roots of griotism and its political consciousness and combines them with contemporary elements such as rapping. In some way, they both impart lessons of social and political history in order to preserve and keep their cultures alive (Banks, 2010, p. 240).



### *2.3. Colonial and slavery days*

Colonialism can be considered as the most important factor on the birth of most black music genres. In fact, the history of slavery is one of the cruelest periods of the history of humankind and its importance should not be overlooked. The rise of postcolonial studies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has raised interest in the African diaspora and the effect of it: the scattering of African people through slave trading across the world. It is the largest forced migration in human history and its economic effect on the African continent proved devastating, as generations of people were taken from their communities and societies were disrupted. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database estimates that over 12 million people were forcibly shipped across the Atlantic in the span of 400 years (Estimates, 2020).

One of the many effects of the diaspora is the apparent loss of their culture and identity. As John Roberts argues, “the inclusion of African Americans in a conception of the American folk [...] facilitated the belief that Africans arrived in the North American continent bereft of both culture and history” (2009, p. 114). Which is to say, enslavement had the effect of wiping away the heritage of black cultures. Nonetheless, for Roberts, the foundation for African American culture is its “capability of sustaining itself under such horrendous conditions as enslavement and continuing patterns of oppression” (2009, p.114). The well-documented brutality and hostility of Europeans against African slaves in America is not a reason to abandon a culture for one that does not show any interest for their survival.

Fundamentally, the European enslavement of African people involved the encounter of two cultural systems, and it is observed in the creation of many Afro-American genres of music. Therefore, the culture of enslaved Africans in America preserves a trace of their past traditions as they brought their musical tradition to the New World. As Roberts claims, “culture is recursive, [...] dynamic and creative as it adapts to social needs and goals” (2009, p. 115). Taking this into consideration, the African oral and musical tradition is not hip-hop, but its transformation. The ideals and practices of the previously mentioned African musical traditions are transformed, not abandoned, and “represent an attempt to maintain adherence to [group values] under new conditions” (Roberts, 2009, p. 115). The contemporary status of Afro-Americans, however, stem from the same problems their ancestors suffered: slavery and racism. Thus, prominent themes in hip-hop such as violence and cruelty are an echo of the transatlantic slave trade, which

over time came to constitute a “powerful cluster of cultural beliefs” (Roberts, 2009, p. 116).

### **3. HIP HOP INFLUENCES**

#### *3.1. Caribbean connection*

The days of slavery have left a permanent mark on the island of Jamaica as most socioeconomic problems stem from the oppression suffered during colonial times. This section is going to focus on how black people of Jamaica presented a counter-identity of the ruling elites through Rastafari and reggae, how that contributed to shaping Afro-American and Afro-Jamaican identities, and how these different movements translate into the creation of hip-hop.

The development of hip-hop is part of a continuous and mutual process of change, in which different Afro communities in the Caribbean were in contact and ‘talked to each other’, preserving a common identity. Reggae was born in a climate of poverty and inequality in the shantytowns of Kingston, Jamaica’s capital, and forms part of the Rastafari social and religious movement, which used the musical style to spread its word. Originally, Jamaican musicians, many of them from the Rastafari religion, listened to radio stations from the United States and blended American R&B and jazz with Jamaican folk music. Thus, the birth of hip-hop in New York City owed much to the city’s Jamaican community.

Reggae’s connection with hip-hop goes back to its concern with black pride and black identity mixing social criticism and political protest (Hebdige, 2000, p. 25). The past of oppression and imperialism in the West Indies is key to consider when analyzing reggae artists as Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, and Jimmy Cliff aimed to criticize the ruling elites in favor of the lives of the Jamaican population. Reggae has a long history of presenting the counter-history to the ‘accepted’ colonial story that was imprinted by the ruling classes, and many reggae artists “recounted the horrors of slavery” which in turn “inspired pride in black youth with tales of glorious African history” (Hagerman, 2016, p. 385). Playing reggae in Jamaica was a form of protest and resistance due to the low popularity among middle class citizens because it defied “religious and social norms” (Hagerman, 2016, p. 386) established by the ruling colonial authorities; it opposed the normative establishment.

Musically, reggae was effective due to its success in areas with high illiteracy, where the music acted as a way to escape real-world problems and as an opportunity to

voice opinions which would be normally censored by the government (King & Jensen, 1995, p. 19). The simplicity of this music allowed for many people to identify with its message and provided hope to the black population of the island. Thus, reggae is protest music, and as such, it identifies an antagonist and offers an alternative to the existing social order as the Rastafarian movement preaches (King & Jensen, 1995, p. 20).

### 3.1.1. The Rastafarian Movement

The Rastafarian movement is of utmost importance to understand reggae as it takes pride in the African heritage of the Jamaican people by means of social critique and religious practices. Rastafari is an Abrahamic belief which emerged as a response to the social and political conditions in 1930s Jamaica. At the heart of these issues was the impossibility of prosperity of Afro-Jamaican inhabitants of the island due to the remnants of the colonialist society kept up by white people at the top of the socio-economic hierarchy. Rastafari helped create a common sense of identity through Afrocentrism and Pan-African perspectives.

The Rastafarian ‘doctrine’ was based on four main pillars. First, the condemnation of Jamaica’s colonial society. The Rastafarian movement challenged Jamaica’s neo-colonialist society and as Barry Chevannes argues, it helped form a “counter-consciousness to middle-class nationalism that ultimately represented an altering of Jamaican nationality” (Chevannes in Singh, 2004, p. 20). Second, the belief of repatriation to Africa as the key to overcoming oppression. Rastafari proclaims the repatriation to *Zion*, the “promised land” or in this case, Ethiopia: the alleged original birthplace of humankind. Similar to the ancient Hebrews, Rastafaris saw themselves as the “residual unfortunates” and projected their powerlessness through the oppression of *Babylon* (Singh, 2004, p. 21). Babylon for the Rastafari is synonym to the white-dominated world and everything evil: colonialism, imperialism, and slavery. In fact, Alan Eyre writes about the role of fantasy geography among the Rastafarians of Jamaica and states that “the repatriation or exodus of biblical prophecy is the ultimate hope of every Rastafarian” (2007, p. 145). Third, peace and nonviolence, mostly preached by reggae. Despite the high criminality in the island, Zion was the promised land where “all cultures can rejoice in the unity of love” (King & Jensen, 1995, p. 30). And finally, the worship of Haile Selassie (King, 2002, p. 18) as Jesus in his Second Advent, or as God the Father. The crowning of Haile Selassie is the catalytic event that cemented the Rastafarian movement. Selassie’s crowning as the emperor of Ethiopia and subsequent deification

was “a response to the dominance of the British crown in the culture of Jamaica” (Campbell, 1988, p. 78).

All in all, Rastafari was concerned with the rediscovery of black identity. Anthropologist Charles Price concludes that “embracing one’s sense of being black was both a prerequisite and an effect of finding peace by means of one’s faith” (Price, 2009, p. 804). The lies and myths engraved by British colonialism in Jamaica brought about the counternarrative of Rastafari. As Frantz Fanon states, “in decolonization, there is the need of a complete calling in question of the colonial situation” (1963, p. 37) so, Rastafari is a perfect example of this. At a time of economic depression, Rastafari challenged the negative connotations of blackness and it was able to present black ethnicity in a more positive light after centuries of colonialist rule. By taking “pride of the past African culture and history” and “creating a collective memory from the experiences of slavery and colonialism”, Rastafari redefined the African-Caribbean identity and created a New World African diasporic identity (Singh, 2004, p. 33).

### 3.1.2. Reggae

Taking everything into consideration, one cannot talk about the significance of reggae and its cultural impact without mentioning Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Jimmy Cliff. The following section will be dedicated to how these artists preached the Rastafarian beliefs through reggae music and contributed to its spread. An analysis of his songs gives us an insight to the persuasive power of music to change society.

In Marley’s case, his use of powerful metaphors helped popularize Rastafarian ideals through the simple dichotomies such as of good against evil and peace against war (King & Jensen, 1995, p. 18). Marley is an interesting figure as he was committed to justice and freedom, and thanks to his ambiguous messages, he managed to identify with a wide range of people (King & Jensen, 1995, p. 30). His depiction of Rastafari icons such as Jah and Babylon moved away from any class or color interpretation: the Rastafari God was “the creator of universe” and Babylon “the oppressor” (King & Jensen, 1995, p. 30). Moreover, through the themes of poverty and oppression in his music, he also appealed to all listeners in third-world conditions (King & Jensen, 1995, p. 31). Marley’s revolutionary views meant “freedom and the presence of universal equal rights” (Hagerman, 2016, p. 380) so, his music and messages instigated the oppressed to fight back the oppressor. For instance, in “Chant Down Babylon”, Marley incites the fall of everything evil through music: “A Reggae Music, mek we chant down Babylon” (1983).

Although more extremist in his views, Peter Tosh was highly critical of Jamaica's political *shitstem*. His critical comments on the One Love Peace Concert are a perfect example of his views. Tosh invoked the Rastafari concept of *word, sound, power*, which converges "mental, sonic, and spiritual forces of transformation, truth, and resistance" (Mathes, 2010, p. 35) in order to "break down the barriers of oppression and drive away transgression and rule equality between humble black people" (Tosh in Mathes, 2010, p. 35). His intolerance of "Jamaican state's persecution of the poor and its subservience to US and European imperialism" rendered him a clear threat and was beaten and harassed by the police numerous times for that (Mathes, 2010, p. 35). Tosh was also profoundly critical of Jamaica's criminalization of marihuana or *ganja*, as it was a commodity to be policed by the Jamaican regimes of order rather than "a recourse to be harnessed for the benefit of the national economy" (Mathes, 2010 p. 38). This is reflected in his breakout album and song *Legalize It*, where he claims he will "advertise it" in order to promote Jamaica's economy (1976).

Although not a Rastafari, reggae artist Jimmy Cliff also shared some of the ideals of the movement and aimed to improve the lives of Jamaicans. He was responsible for bringing reggae to an international audience for the first time through the classic soundtrack in *The Harder They Come* (1972) by Jamaican director Perry Henzell. Starring Cliff himself, the movie was successful due to its naturalistic portrayal of black Jamaicans in its locations and the use of patois. His musical contribution would be vital for the birth of hip-hop as his songs would reach the United States and other Western audiences that had never heard of reggae.

### 3.2. Reggae and hip-hop

Reggae influences in hip-hop are evident in form, through the technical advances, and in content, like lyrics and themes. The most important innovations in reggae are *dubbing* and *toasting*, the forms that would later evolve into *scratching* (later *sampling*) and *emceeing* (now *rapping*). *Dubbing* consisted of making an instrumental remix of Jamaican 45s B-side in order to hype up the crowds in shows. As Luke Eldrich describes it: "dub is a kaleidoscopic musical montage which takes sounds originally intended as interlocking parts of another arrangement and using them as raw material, converts them into new and different sounds" (Ehrlich, 1982, p. 105).

The sound techniques imported from 1970s Jamaica would allow artists to record their voices over instrumental tracks as well as adding sound effects (gun shots, for instance). DJs in Jamaica used to talk over instrumentals in order to hype up the public,

hence the name toasting. Most sources credit Clive Campbell, commonly referred as DJ Kool Herc as the pioneer who brought the Jamaican sound systems to New York block parties. He was indeed a Jamaican migrant that came into the Bronx and brought with him the technology and techniques that gave place to hip-hop in its many forms.

One key aspect of reggae that is seen in hip-hop is repetition in the form of versioning, which is at the heart of all Afro-American and Caribbean music. For instance, a reggae record can have “hundreds of different versions of the same rhythm or melody, and each version adds a personal touch” (Hebdige, 2000, p. 13). Borrowing people’s work is a pillar of hip-hop as well. By quoting or versioning, an artist is paying respect to his or her origins and as culture is recursive, in order “to evoke, one must be able to invoke” (Hebdige, 2000, p. 15). All in all, versioning may recall the postmodern belief that there is no longer originality, and everything has already been said. However, versioning has many different forms and its beauty relies in the fact that “no one has the final say” (Hebdige, 2000, p. 15).

As for the content of reggae, many parallels can be seen in its lyrics. As mentioned in this paper, reggae reflected the harsh realities of the lives of black people in Jamaica. Hip-hop continues the black music social critique tradition as it also reflected the street life and class and race discrimination African Americans suffered. Both genres emerged from “a context of oppression and both reflect the lifestyle and sensibilities of urban ghettos” (Dagnini, 2010, p. 9). And as seen through the lyrics of its most prominent musicians, both rebel against the establishment of the ruling elites. Although hip-hop origins were block parties, later evolutions in rap lyrics would become its most important contribution to the Afro-American identity. For instance, *gangsta rap* offered a hard-edged look at inner cities from the ones that lived there: the same gang violence and drug dealing that could be lived in Jamaica towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, Jamaican migrants that settled in The Bronx brought the cultural revolution that took place in the island and hip-hop continued denouncing social injustices faced by blacks in their communities.

### *3.3. North America: The South and the blues*

Hip-hop’s fascination with jazz, soul and even blues is apparent in the heavy use of sampling of numerous funky beats, grooves, bass lines of artists such as Gil Scott-Heron. This section will be dedicated to hip-hop’s closest influences and their importance not only to music but for the Afro American identity. Therefore, this section will explore the simultaneous growth and influence of the blues, the American-born music genre, and will

end with the greatest examples of the genre's evolution to hip-hop as it is seen in the late Gil Scott-Heron.

The Blues were born at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Deep South of the United States. It would become the cornerstone of all popular American music since many of the following genres would be influenced in some way by it. Like reggae, blues' origins come from a background of slavery and exploitation. As seen, slaves brought their musical traditions with them during the diaspora, and in this case, blues were born out of the mix of spirituals and work songs.

### 3.3.1. Spirituals and African American Religion

Sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois originally labeled Spirituals as 'sorrow songs' in *The Souls of Black Folk*, in which "the slave spoke to the world", and spoke "of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world" (2015, p. 191-3). In his opinion, sorrow songs or spirituals "stand not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas" (2015, p. 189).

Spirituals are the religious roots of the blues. As slaves encountered Christianity, they combined their past religious customs within the limits of the slave system. Du Bois also makes an interesting remark on the birth of the "Negro church": an "adaptation and mingling of heathen rites among the members of each plantation, and roughly designated as Voodooism" (2015, p. 147). As Charles Joyner notes, "slaves did not so much adapt to Christianity [...] as adapt Christianity to themselves (Joyner in Vondey, 2012, p. 154). So, the African folk religion was centered around their oral tradition: narratives, songs, and any form of communication that allowed slaves to preserve their values and rituals (Vondey, 2012, p. 154). Therefore, the result was very different from the traditional Christian liturgy, because although they were "oriented along the lines of the European rituals" these aspects were "transformed by the imagination and rhythm of their African roots" (Vondey, 2012, p. 154). "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" is one of the most recognized African American spirituals passed down orally over generations and reflect the spiritual lives of slaves. When slaves sang "Swing low, sweet chariot / Coming for to carry me home" (Willis) they were not only looking for spiritual freedom, but also literal freedom.

As a matter of fact, the figure of the "Negro preacher" is important in the formation of future forms of music such as jazz and hip-hop as improvisation was a pillar of their performances. The clear "unrehearsed nature of any liturgical showed the openness born out of a sense of spiritual liberty" (Vondey, 2012, p. 154) and would influence other black genres such as jazz and hip-hop. As seen in the "call and response"

format of their performances, their parables were a way to establish a dialogue between speaker and audience, challenging borders between preacher and congregation and encouraging an interactive spiritual experience for everyone alike. Black religion, thus, has been conducive to the early development of many American genres such as the blues and jazz.

### 3.3.2. Work Songs: Slave Music as Resistance

The expressive moans made by slaves and the prominence of black religion are the true soul of the blues. Although it is true that Afro-American slaves were expected to sing while they worked in plantations, work songs were a form of resistance and preservation of culture. As Frederick Douglass tells in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, “a silent slave is not liked by masters or overseers” (2014, p. 79). So, a prominent characteristic of the blues is the “call-and-response” format, also seen in black churches. As a matter of fact, this format is connected to the African tradition of singing during repetitive fieldwork. As an example, “Long John” combined spiritual and secular concerns, like the wish of escape from bondage, which is a desire felt by all slaves: “If a man die / He will live again / Well they crucified Jesus / And they nailed him to the cross / Sister Mary cried / My child is lost / Well Long John / He’s long gone” (Washington). Therefore, work songs were also a mechanism to preserve their African origins through resistance. Douglass’ description found in his narrative of what he heard as a slave is key to understand the importance of music for slaves at the time: “every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains” (2015, p. 81). His descriptions of slave songs suggest a more contemporary reader of the blues: a reminder of hardship, slavery and just being black.

### 3.4. *The blues and hip-hop*

The relationship between hip-hop and the blues is a distant one and not too apparent at first sight. First, both were started by underclass African Americans and both make clear the dissatisfaction and indignation against the status quo (Danaher & Blackwelder, 2008, p. 1). Interestingly, both genres were dismissed by whites and considered damaging for the morals of youth at their beginnings. Due to the problematization of social relations and status quo, both were deemed as dangerous by the whites in power. To continue with, rap music carries out the African oral tradition that was embraced in blues in the form of *signifying*, *toasting* and *playing the dozens* (Danaher & Blackwelder, 2008, p. 4). These traditions often involved insults or hidden meanings to verbally outdo an opponent, much



like a rap battle. Mona Lisa Saloy writes about how “African Americans boast a lively verbal art tradition” in the form of toasts: “performed narratives of often urban but always heroic events” (Saloy, 1989). Lyrics of the blues and rap share the same statement that they “may be adapted by and utilized as ideological statements of a social movement” (Danaher & Blackwelder, 2008, p. 5). Music can work as a strong “socializing agent”, and after hearing lyrics of certain songs, their messages might be taken into action and “change the manner in which one social or racial group is viewed by another (Danaher & Blackwelder, 2008, p. 8).

Moreover, lyrics of the blues and rap tell stories of “disadvantage and frustration imposed on young African-Americans” (Danaher & Blackwelder, 2008, p. 7). But, while blues is less direct in its approach, rap often criticizes the system. This is probably because most blues artists performed in pre-civil rights times when Jim Crow laws legitimized their oppression. The blues began as personal music for blacks and the discontent felt by an artist represented the whole black society at the time. As blues artist John Brim sings in “Tough Times”: “Seems like times is getting tough / Like they was in 'thirty-two / You don't have no job / Our bills is past due” (Brim). This reflects not only his personal life, but also the rest of working-class Afro-Americans’ whose opportunities were inhibited by white employers. On the contrary, rap songs explicitly protest against inequality by advocating for a social change thanks to the advances made by the civil-rights movement.

All in all, blues and rap were products of the society from which they emerged. While blues songs “outward evidence of an inward pain which African-Americans suffered at the hands of a racist and segregated society”, rap songs, otherwise “aim to unmask the suffering and the cause of such pain, frustration, and disadvantage” (Danaher & Blackwelder, 2008, p. 10). So, blues were a way of expressing the pains of oppression and hip-hop is no exception to this. Hip-hop is fueled by the same personal emotions of oppression and hopelessness that inner-city African Americans experienced. Thus, hip-hop is a successor of the blues in the sense of an attitude: it channels negative emotions musically in order to create a unique sound and feeling.

### *3.5. Gil Scott-Heron, the “Godfather” of rap*

The tumultuous events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century made music an important art form in which artists could either express their beliefs and protest or simply escape from the harsh realities many groups and ethnicities suffered from. Rock music, reggae, punk and many other genres contributed to the creation of identities that helped propel a counterculture against the establishment imposed by the ruling elites. As seen in this paper, Bob Marley

was committed to justice and freedom, but other artists shared Marley's goals. Another figure that is key to understand the birth of hip-hop is Gil Scott-Heron, a contemporary of Marley in many ways as they both relentlessly critiqued human oppression and racism (Chavis, 2011) through their music and their ideals. While Marley predicated the Rastafari way of living through reggae for worldwide peace, Scott-Heron branched out across blues, jazz, soul, and R&B to denounce the social and political injustices of his time.

During his career, Scott-Heron played a key role in the evolution from jazz, blues and soul to hip-hop as his spoken word performances were charged with political messages that paved the ground for the following generations of rappers. For instance, his politically charged poetry in "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" is considered a sort of "proto-rap" because his lyricism was accompanied by a repetitive base. In fact, his work has "undoubtedly bridged the culture revolutions of the 60s and the 70s up to the evolution of the hip-hop generation in the 1980s" (Chavis, 2011). Scott-Heron's "Home Is Where the Hatred Is" paints a somber picture of a dangerous environment. When he sings: "Home is where the hatred is / Home is filled with pain and it / Might not be such a bad idea if I never / Never went home again" (Scott-Heron), he is exposing the social disillusionment and hopelessness many Afro-Americans experienced in the inner cities, similarly to the next generation of rappers. So, his upbringing in the Bronx might have had an impact on his poetry and political lyrics. More importantly, he became a major voice for black people's social and political struggle. He pointed out the socioeconomic difference amongst white and black people in his songs like on "Whitey On the Moon", where he denounced the government policies that neglected black people: "I can't pay no doctor bill / but Whitey's on the moon" (Scott-Heron). All in all, Scott-Heron was a decisive and "inspirational bridge" artist between the culture revolutions of the 1960's and the 1970's up to the evolution of the hip-hop generation in the 1980's (Chavis, 2011).

This section has shown how reggae and soul music were born with the aim of resistance against the ruling elites in whichever form it took and hip-hop is no exception to this. Now, the next section is going to detail the situation during these critical decades in the United States' history and how that resulted in the birth of Hip Hop.

## 4. HIP HOP

### 4.1. *Postindustrial America: Hip Hop and identity*

The abolition of slavery was not the final battle for African Americans to attain human rights. Starting around 1870, the Jim Crow laws were the main way in which black people were systematically segregated and discriminated until around 1965, thanks to the advances attained through The Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement is of utmost importance to understand the state of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as it served to fuel the Black Power movement that influenced the first generations of hip-hop artists. The decades of fight against systematic oppression, however, were not the end of racism as the urban areas of the country did not improve much for various reasons.

The rise of gang violence and drug dealing of the era were the result of the systemic neglect from the government. Tricia Rose writes about the importance to locate hip-hop culture “within the context of deindustrialization in the 1970s and the postindustrial urban landscape in the 1980s as it greatly impacted the African-American urban communities” (1994, p. 25). The conservative policies of the government at the time resulted in loss of social services and migration of colored people into America’s cities. Coupled with lack of opportunities for black people, the poorest neighborhoods, such as The Bronx, were made “target of massive relocation of economically fragile population” (Rose, 1994, p. 30).

So, during the 1970s, Hip Hop allowed the marginalized youth of urban areas to express their dissatisfaction and voice their frustration with the current political and economic situation. It was a platform on which young artists could use their voices and bodies to transform their circumstances for the better. Amidst volatile social and economic change, the Afro-American youth used hip-hop to channel an emotional response to the injustices in their everyday lives and create a new alternative identity in a community with no institutions that supported them. The Hip Hop movement appropriated many of the public spaces as a response to everything that had been taken away from the black communities: graffities and block parties are a way to regain public spaces. As Rose puts it, they were “aggressive public displays of counter-presence and voice. Each asserted the right to write to inscribe one's identity on an environment that seemed [...] resistant to its young people of color (1994, p. 59).

#### *4.2. Black power and the arts: aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement*

The Black Power Movement was a reaction to the murder of leading figures of the Civil Rights movement: Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. The movement split into two main radically different branches: both the Revolutionary Nationalists and Cultural Nationalists were two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, the Black Panther Party spawned from the Revolutionary side and developed into a “Marxist revolutionary group that called for the arming of all African Americans” (Neal, 1968, p. 29). On the other hand, The Black Arts Movement was the “aesthetic and spiritual sister of Black Power” (Neal, 1968, p. 29). The Last Poets are one of the groups that emerged under the Black Arts, and their poetry has been compared to Gil Scott-Heron’s in the sense that it has propelled the Hip Hop movement with politically charged commentary.

Hip Hop is considered by many as a spiritual successor of The Black Arts Movement as it has “remained true to many of its convictions and aesthetic criteria” (Gladney, 1995, p. 291). In many ways, the anger felt by the black youth in the 80s and 90s paralleled the anger felt by Afro-Americans upon the death of Martin Luther King. As a matter of fact, the strong connection between hip-hop and the Black Power Movement is clearly observed in “Black Art”, a poem by the considered founder of the movement, Amiri Baraka. In this poem, Baraka claimed for “poems that kill, assassin poems, poems that shoot guns” (1965) in order to advocate for cultural revolution through art. In turn, this would create a “black aesthetic” that would “re-evaluate western aesthetics, [...] and the social function of art” (Neal, 1968, p. 29). Having said that, Baraka’s poem ends with an assertion of the Black Power Movement: “We want a black poem. And a / Black World. / Let the world be a Black Poem / And Let All Black People Speak This Poem / Silently / Or LOUD” (1965). As Larry Neal argues, “the poem comes to stand for the collective conscious and unconscious of Black America, [it was] the real impulse in back of the Black Power movement” (Neal, 1968, p. 32). All in all, this poem attempts to define the purpose of Black Arts: assist black people to “survive in an environment that is hostile to them” (Gladney, 1995, p. 297).

#### *4.3. The 80s and the rise of conscious rap*

In many ways, hip-hop music is a contemporary extension of the great intellectual tradition of the Black Arts Movement. Many artists carried on the tradition of critiquing the racial and class-based experience of America in the inner cities. The title of “poetry of the streets” started to be thrown around when Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five’s (GG&FF) released their 1982 classic “The Message”, which became a mainstream hit

and supposed “the critical changing point where hip-hop evolved from fun party music to destructive and nihilistic street anthems” (Jenkins, 2011, 1232). In retrospective, this song pioneered the way hip-hop depicted ghetto life: “It's like a jungle sometimes / It makes me wonder how I keep from goin' under” (GF&FF). The song commented on New York's deteriorating conditions and more importantly, warned the listener with a threatening message: “Don't push me, 'cause I'm close to the edge” (GG&FF) which reflected the Black Power edge of hip-hop.

In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan solidified the conservative politics that would provoke a rise in the political and conscious hip-hop. Public Enemy (PE) *bum rushed the show* with their politically heavy music and messages, in which they criticized the United States media and discussed the frustrations and concerns of the African American community. Public Enemy were among the first to continue the Black Arts tradition in hip-hop as they heralded Baraka's wish for a black world with their seminal album “Fear of a Black Planet”. In a way, the group's biggest hit “Fight the Power” reflects the commitment of PE as leaders battling for progressive change by calling into fight “the powers that be” (PE). Apart from the hook, the highlight of the song has to be Chuck D's fearless attack on American icons that embody America's ideals: “Elvis was a hero to most / But he never meant shit to me, you see / Straight up racist that sucker was simple and plain / Motherfuck him and John Wayne” (1989). Chuck goes on to expose the reality of a post-colonial America through the eyes of the oppressed: “Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps / Sample a look back you look and find / Nothing but rednecks for 400 years if you check” (1989). The heroes of the white-dominant culture have made nothing for black people and do not represent them. So, what meaning could they have for Chuck?

Moreover, their production elevated the genre to a new dimension thanks to their creative way of sampling. In a way, sampling is hip-hop's intertextuality. Anne Danielsen writes about how their production “linked musical recordings with certain sociopolitical realities” to form an “unmatched collage of noise” (2008, p. 410). Many of their songs intertwined real-life sound effects such as police sirens or mass media snippets with music buzzing guitar solos. This made their music report on reality, like a “CNN of Black Folk” with a more realistic portrayal of media in hip-hop (Rose, 2004, p. 356). PE's hybrid of art, politics, and social reality was successful because it showed the performative nature of their music: they demanded action to “fight the powers that be” (PE).

The group's success opened the door to more politically and racially explicit material, but not without its good share of controversy. Public Enemy's rage put a focus on black nationalism and radical thought which transitioned into N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton* (1988). Clearly influenced by PE's first albums, this album marked the rise of the West Coast sound which defined hip-hop's next big subgenres: *hard-core* and *gangsta rap*. N.W.A. narrated the experiences and life fantasies as a "poor young black subject within areas severely paralyzed by the postindustrial economic redistribution" (Rose, 1994, p. 59). Ronald Reagan's election in the 1980s perpetuated the rise of neo-conservative policies (like the war on drugs) that resulted in harsh sentences for crimes, causing an explosion in the prison population of the vulnerable classes (McCann, 2012, p. 368). Bryan J. McCann writes about how "the mark of criminality" functioned as a way to rationalize the continued subjugation of African Americans following the abolition of slavery and sustaining white supremacy (2012, p. 370). In "Sound of da Police", KRS-One establishes the clear connection between the postcolonial reality of America in his clever association between police "officer" and "overseer":

The overseer had the right to get ill  
And if you fought back, the overseer had the right to kill  
The officer has the right to arrest  
And if you fight back they put a hole in your chest! (1993)

Hence, his lyrics protested institutionalized racism, oppression, and violence against the black community. Similarly, one of N.W.A.'s most important contributions to the genre is "Fuck tha Police", in which Ice Cube exposes racial discrimination of police officers against black people: "Fuck the police comin' straight from the underground / A young nigga got it bad cause I'm brown / And not the other color so police think / They have the authority to kill a minority" (N.W.A.). Lack of opportunities and social services made crime for some young black Americans the only way to survive. Thus, Ice Cube's energetic rhymes proved the potential for hip-hop as a platform to speak out against police brutality that devastated the lives of the Afro-American population in ghettos and inner cities.

Due to the group's success, the use of explicit, violent and even misogynistic lyrics grew exponentially and led to the rise of gangsta rap in the following decade. After selling more than 2 million copies, the group demonstrated the financial viability of a "hard-core street aesthetic" (Watts, 2004, p. 598) and many artists followed suit, making gangsta rap the predominant genre from the 90s to the mid-2000s.

#### *4.4. Hip Hop is dead: is Hip Hop selling out?*

In 2006, rapper Nas released his provocative eight studio album *Hip Hop Is Dead*, which opened a debate on the direction the genre was heading. After more than a full decade of gangsta rap, misogynistic lyrics and party hits topping the charts, some of the most prominent artists started to question the integrity of this genre. The “Hip Hop is dead” discussion is built on the principle that hip-hop was predestined to become the ideal of resistance and social transformation in a post-Civil Rights era. Many critics have argued that the progressive force of early hip-hop has been substituted by consumerism and represents the concerns of corporations: hip-hop’s black power ideology was abandoned in favor of profitable commercial interests. Nevertheless, despite the general sense of hip-hop being dumbed down since its origins, many examples of political and conscious lyrics can still be found because hip-hop has never comprised a coherent culture or political discourse for black America. For instance, Kendrick Lamar’s *To Pimp a Butterfly* has become one of the most acclaimed rap records of all time and his song “Alright” has become an anthem of African American unity against police brutality and can be heard in Black Lives Matter’s protests where youth sang its chorus: “we gon’ be alright” (Lamar). All in all, this is just one example of the diversity of the genre that has only become more varied over time. That it is to say, hip-hop is not any less political or thought-provoking than in the past, there is just more variation than ever. Hip-hop’s topics are no less complex and probably are broader and enticing as they have ever been.

#### *4.5. Masculinity and the code of the streets*

The issue of masculinity in hip-hop must be understood within the context of class and race-based oppression and within the wider context of the United States under neo-liberal policies. A study about the relationship between class, violence and sexual performance among young black men points that the “massive unemployment caused by neo-liberal reforms have led to a growing number of young men basing their authority vis-à-vis women on bodily powers, understood as abilities and physique of the male body” (Groes-Green, 2009). Therefore, toxic hypermasculinity is expressed through verbal or physical domination over female bodies. The “code of the street” is the way in which identity is built and kept. Sociologist Elijah Anderson lays the bases for this code: “a set of prescriptions and proscriptions, or informal rules, of behavior organized around a desperate search for respect that governs public social relations, especially violence, among so many residents, particularly young men and women” (1999, p. 11). Therefore, the street code structures the lives of young inner-city black males and gives them a

“manhood identity that is based around domination and violence” (Watts, 2004, p. 595) stemming from the economic and social distress suffered from young inner-city males, who feel isolated from the system.

Masculinity takes the form of “realness” or “being hard” in hip-hop slang; these consist on repressing feminine traits in any way. Damien Arthur argues that “rap is consumed as a fantasy in which teenage males can forge strong masculine identities that they find difficult to assume at school or family context”. Such fantasies include “the pimp and the gangster” (Arthur, 2006, p. 113) both of which are highly regarded within their communities. Rapper 50 Cent epitomized the masculine fantasy with his persona and his songs. The most prominent example has to be “P.I.M.P.”, where he glorifies the pimp lifestyle: “I don't know what you heard about me / But a bitch can't get a dollar out of me / No Cadillac, no perms, you can't see / That I'm a motherfuckin' P-I-M-P” (50 Cent).

Arthur continues to deconstruct the creation of black masculinity in the face of blocked economic identities (2006, p. 109). Due to the changes in the construction of masculinity throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (like women being “bread-winners” as well), other ways of achieving the desired masculinity are sought. For instance, treating women as mere sexual objects or symbols of status allows the black youth to assert the masculinity that has been deprived from them. In “Bitches Ain't Shit”, famous gangsta rapper Snoop Dogg sings: “Bitches ain't shit but hoes and tricks / Lick on these nuts and suck the dick / Gets the fuck out after you're done / Then I hops in my coupe to make a quick run” (1992), a perfect example of women as sources of sexual activity but also deceitful.

Finally, violence is also one way to remain “authentic” towards the rest of the competing masculine community. Violence emerges from a sense of personal responsibility due to the black community being abandoned in the social paradigm of the US. In the case of hip-hop, hyperviolence is seen practically in every direction. Nonetheless, Eminem is one of the most interesting and controversial figures of hip-hop for many reasons: notably the fact that he is not black and his exaggerated violent and homophobic lyrics. For instance, in “'97 Bonnie & Clyde” Eminem raps about killing his ex-wife and then throwing her corpse into the ocean: “Oh, where's Mama? She's takin' a little nap in the trunk” (1999). Eminem being white caused him a lot of initial rejection in the hip-hop scene, so his desire to attain status in a predominantly black genre led to reaffirm his masculinity – and by consequence his “hardness” – through his music. As



Arthur states, “his poor economic background, affiliation with and acceptance by black artists and hypermasculine behavior validate his social-locational and racial ‘realness’” (2006, p. 110). In part, Eminem became known by his attacks to celebrities and pop singers. In “The Real Slim Shady”, he raps “I’m sick of you, little girl and boy groups / all you do is annoy me / so I have been sent here to destroy you” (2000). Eminem wanted to be recognized in hip-hop culture through his opposition to the mainstream, hence, “hardness” is attained by becoming resistant to it.

#### *4.6. Black female identity and empowering voices in hip-hop*

Given the hypermasculinity enacted by male hip-hop artists, the female voice in hip-hop is of utmost importance to understand the power struggle between genders and cannot be overlooked. Black female rappers such as Queen Latifah, and black-female group Salt-N-Pepa constitute a powerful resistance to a male dominated genre and promoted women empowerment. It must be noted that even though black female rappers have attained success and reputation, they struggled in order to attain status and their importance has been severely downplayed. Cheryl L. Keyes states that “in their struggle to survive and thrive within this tradition, they have created spaces from which to deliver powerful messages from Black female and Black feminist perspectives” (2004, p. 265). The social and cultural tradition in hip-hop functioned as a platform for feminist and womanist themes. In contrast to male rapper’s social criticism on police harassment, black women rapper’s “central contestation is in the arena of sexual politics” (Rose, 1994, p. 147). However, positioning them in complete contrast to male rappers would be inaccurate as they respond to broader issues than the man-to-woman relationship such as feminism.

For instance, Queen Latifah’s “Ladies First” is a “landmark example of centralizing a strong black female public voice” (Rose, 1994, p. 163). The video and lyrics result in a “statement for black female unity, independence and power, as well as an anti-colonial statement concerning Africa’s southern region” (Rose, 2004, p. 300). First, her assertive raps defend the status and capability of women to change the political and social status:

The ladies will kick it, the rhyme it is wicked  
Those who don’t know how to be pros get evicted  
A woman can bear you, break you, take you  
Now it’s time to rhyme, can you relate to  
A sister dope enough to make you holler and scream? (Queen Latifah)

For the video of the song, images of politically prominent black women and footage of black protests are flashed. Therefore, Latifah positions herself as “part of the legacy of black women’s activism, racial commitment and cultural pride” (Rose, 2004, p. 165). In this song, Latifah is not attacking black men, instead, she is “rewriting the contribution of black women in the history of black struggles” (Rose, 2004, p. 165). As Latifah explains in an interview, “sisters have been in the midst of these things for a long time, but we just don’t get to see it that much” (Latifah in Rose, 2004, p. 165). The aim of the song and video was to show the centrality of black women in the political and social struggle against oppression.

Other black women rappers such as Salt-N-Pepa “display physical and sexual freedom” that “challenge male notions of female sexuality and pleasure” (Rose, 2004, p. 301). The hip-hop group Salt-N-Pepa constitutes an important and resistive voice in rap and contemporary black women’s cultural production overall (Rose, 2004, p. 182). In their hit song “Shake Your Thang”, they chant “It’s my thang and I’ll swing it the way that I feel, with a little seduction and some sex appeal” (Salt-N-Pepa). Their display of black women’s sexual resistance is a strong stance against the “morally based sexual constrictions placed on them as women”, and “mock moral claims about the proper modes of women’s expression” (Rose, 2004, p. 302). So, their voices provide young black women with a space which challenges sexual discourses by male rappers and rejects the racially coded hierarchies in American culture.

Taking everything into consideration, women constitute a powerful voice in hip-hop and promote female and racial empowerment through their songs. Thanks to their advances, rap music has expanded and cannot be imagined without black women’s voices. Unfortunately, their contributions and impact have been overlooked as Hip Hop is a male centric culture. That is not to say there is no feminist-themed rap music by men where they empower women through their lyrics. Artists such as Common and the group Blackstar are some notable examples that made their own contributions, which hopefully leads to more examples of empowering messages in the future.

#### *4.7. A better tomorrow: contemporary hip-hop and the future*

Recently, the notion of hypermasculinity in hip-hop has been turned on its head with artists like Kanye West, Tyler the Creator or the boy band Brockhampton. Their success in recent times has contributed to the deconstruction of hip-hop’s masculine identity and the acceptance of queer (fashion) styles. In a previous section, we observed how violence and repression of feminine traits functioned as ways to attain a “hard” or “real” status.

However, when fashion-obsessed rap superstar Kanye West came into the picture, it supposed an evolution from the street-focused themes of earlier decades. Many of his songs contained conscious lyrics which were not commonplace in mainstream music like in “Crack Music”: “How we stop the Black Panthers? / Ronald Reagan cooked up an answer / You hear that? What Gil Scott was hearin’? / When our heroes or heroines got hooked on heroin (West). West also made some comments regarding rap’s attitude towards gays and lesbians, asking for other hip-hop artists to stop discriminating: “Not just hip-hop, but America just discriminates. And I wanna [...] come on TV and just tell my rappers [...], ‘Yo, stop it’” (West in Penney, 2012, p. 322).

Moreover, in 2007, Kanye West and 50 Cent (as seen, the personification of gangsta rap) released an album on the same day which famously resulted in a selling “chart war”. West outsold 50 Cent significantly, and thus, “changed [the] dynamics of hip-hop aesthetics and economics in the 2000s” (Penney, 2012, p. 323). The departure from the gangster persona was not received well by some homophobic artists. Joel Penney talks about how newer “queen-inflected aesthetics” caused “an identity crisis for those who continue to be invested in conflating the genre with aggressive hypermasculinity” (2012, p. 322). Which by consequence, made gangsta rap no longer hold “monopoly over constructions of the black male body in mainstream hip-hop culture” (Penney, 2012, p. 322). Nowadays many rappers have become fashion designers and tight clothing has become more accepted. Penney deconstructs the use of baggy pants (“uniform” for the gangsta) as a “symbolic stand-in for the male genitalia they conceal” (Penney, 2012, p. 327). In turn, tight clothing “draw[s] attention to the entire male form, curves and all”, which supposes a “de-phallicization” (Penney, 2012, p. 327). In other words, it threatens the hyper-masculine identity and more broadly, puts the western patriarchal order in danger.

Other artists such as Young Thug have contributed to the deconstruction of a “street-hardened” sexually promiscuous man. He has toyed with gender dressing norms and argued to be a “gangsta with a dress” (Philips, 2018). Other artists such as Tyler the Creator has evolved from a “provocateur who hurled gay slurs” to a “thoughtful confessor about his attraction to men” (Philips, 2018). Moreover, Brockhampton has established itself as a mainstream boy band “penning verses about current social issues such as mental health, queer issues and rape culture” (Kennedy, 2019). Thus, hip-hop has started to combat dominant masculine identities in the recent times which hopefully marks the

beginning of a widespread movement across all cultures to fight the patriarchal order of the world.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

This paper has demonstrated the appropriateness to classify Hip Hop as a cultural and musical movement that continues the African oral and musical tradition for the creation of new identities under adverse environments. As observed, music is an art form capable of promoting unity between people within cultures and has been a key aspect to preserve the cultures of black people throughout the African diaspora. The diaspora affected the lives of millions of Africans and thanks to resistance enacted through music, black people have been able to preserve their identities coming to the New World. The main link from African traditions to contemporary hip-hop is its oral tradition: through various ways, rappers acts as griots and carry forward African musical traditions to contemporary times.

The analysis of the biggest influences of hip-hop has helped illustrate the long tradition of black music in the against oppression and racism. First, this paper has observed the relevance of reggae music in the fight for worldwide peace and equality. Due to reggae's simplicity, its message has been able to reach audiences throughout the world and spread the Rastafari beliefs. This religious and social movement is present in most of reggae music and as seen through the analysis of reggae's biggest artists, it helped establish a counterculture to the dominant white rule. Thanks to the rediscovery of a black identity, it challenged the myths engraved by British colonialism that stained the island of Jamaica for centuries and consequentially helped decolonise it. Reggae has been key to the development of hip-hop not only in technological advances but also in the attitude that their rebellious artists were known for.

Then, this paper has observed the relevance of the blues in the early development of many American genres that translate into hip-hop. Born in the North American South, blues music is a perfect example of the African oral and musical tradition. Blues music is deeply influenced by religious customs within slave systems as seen in spirituals. Moreover, as slaves worked on plantations, they were forced to sing work songs but that also functioned as a way of resisting against the oppressive system they lived in. The form and content of the blues are a perfect early example of oral traditions in hip-hop. Early developments of African oral tradition music and the attitude shown by blues artists through their lyrics could also be seen towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in hip-hop as well.

To bridge the gap between blues music and hip-hop, this paper has demonstrated how Gil Scott-Heron supposed an inspirational bridge between the culture revolutions of the 60s and 70s. Thanks to his blend of blues, jazz, soul and R&B, his poetry and political lyrics are highly regarded as the earliest versions of rap music. The wider context of the United States during Scott-Heron's career was full of gang violence and drug dealing; both the result of deindustrialization in the 70s. As a response to this, hip-hop allowed marginalized youth of urban areas to express their dissatisfaction with the current political and economic situation. So, the tumultuous events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century generated a climate in which urban lower classes needed to express their identities and reclaim public spaces that were deprived from them.

As a successor of black arts, hip-hop parallels the anger felt by the black youth in the 80s influenced by the Black Power Movement. The purpose of black arts was to assist black people to survive in an environment hostile to them, as the history of African Americans has shown through centuries of slavery. Many hip-hop artists have used their platforms to denounce injustice and inequality as seen through Public Enemy and N.W.A. However, the latter group's success presupposed the rise of misogynistic messages in hip-hop. Masculinity in gangsta rap exposed the wider context of the United States under neo-conservative policies. Unfortunately, the female voice has been severely downplayed due to a male dominant culture, but some queer friendly rappers have appeared in the recent times.

Finally, the arrival of queer-friendly artists has supposed a long overdue wave of progress from a genre that emerged as a response to the injustices and discrimination of the minorities of the United States. Much of gay culture is influencing the world, and hip-hop is no exception. That is not to say toxic masculinity in hip-hop is dead; there is still much to be done in hip-hop and the broader culture. Nonetheless, the mainstream influence of hip-hop hopefully leads newer generations of rappers to be more accepting and welcoming to all kinds of genders, sexualities and identities that defy hypermasculinity characteristic of the western patriarchal order.

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